

Workload Reduction Efforts Gradually Taking Hold

by The Honorable Robert F. Hale

I am committed to ensuring that we get smaller smartly.

Over the next few years the Air Force financial management community will get smaller as we play our part in trimming infrastructure to fund needed modernization efforts. I am committed to ensuring that we get smaller smartly. By that I mean we should not try to do more with less. Rather, we should streamline our business processes so that we can continue to provide good financial service but with fewer people.

This article outlines our streamlining efforts so that you know what has already been accomplished and what is underway. I need your support for these initiatives so that we can accommodate reductions in personnel without sacrificing service to our customers or putting an unreasonable burden on the people in our FM community.

Efforts To Date

✓ Over a year ago now, we went through an intense effort to install local area networks (LANs) throughout every FM office. Today all of our offices have LANs thanks to the concerted efforts of the SAF/FM staff, DFAS-Denver, MAJCOM/FMs, and installation financial managers. Although we could attach no direct workload reduction to this effort, we knew the LANs would speed up many of our processes. As more of our customers catch up with us and install their own LANs, we are beginning to use these interfaces for more extensive projects that will bring us a greater reduction in workload. The Defense Travel System and the Automated Business Services System—initiatives that are discussed more fully below—will be good examples of the add-on capability made possible by our LANs.

The recent reduction in Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) recertification cycle time will lead to an immediate reduction in Financial Services Office (FSO) workload. Rather than the old practice of having every member recertify once a year with all the attendant computer lists, controls, and followups, we will now only recertify BAH upon PCS or every 4 years. While this might seem to be an easy change to make, it took a change in the law. This initiative also involved the careful consideration of internal controls, possible member indebtedness, other similar entitlements (Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA), Cost of Living Allowance (COLA), etc.), and careful coordination with DFAS.

While less frequent recertification will reduce workload, we do not want this benefit to lead to less accurate paychecks. It is our obligation to ensure that members are aware of the circumstances that can affect their pay. But we also believe it is the member's responsibility to report a change in his or her circumstances. In line with this philosophy, we are considering putting an annual message in the base paper or on the LES restating the need to report a change in any of a list of circumstances that would affect their pay.

✓ The new PayCall System will also reduce workload. Already installed and operating, the Interactive Voice Response System known



as PayCall, has been online since October 1997. The PayCall system responds to many routine military pay inquiries that would otherwise be made to our FSOs. For active duty members, PayCall provides the amount of last pay, leave balance, direct deposit information, Federal and State tax information, indebtedness balances (if any), and allotment information. The member can also request a reissued W-2. Reserve and Air National Guard members can also determine their last pay amount, tour dates, Federal and State tax information, indebtedness balances (if any), deductions from last pay, and request a reissued W-2. Members separated within the previous eleven months may receive final pay amount, tax information, indebtedness information (if any), and request reissue of their W-2s.

During January, nearly 32,000 routine inquiries were handled by PayCall. Those were 32,000 lobby customers or phone calls that the FSOs did not have to handle personally. That is a workload reduction we can measure! We worked hard with DFAS-DE to implement this system because every inquiry handled by PayCall is a reduction in workload for our FSOs. This reduction allows us additional time to deal with the more difficult problems our customers bring us.

- ✓ We have also sought to improve our efficiency in budgeting. The Air Force Obligation Adjustment Reporting System (OARS) was one of our early initiatives. This expert system was implemented in October 1997 to track and report upward obligation adjustments required to meet Public Law 101-510 and OSD requirements. It replaced the manual, hardcopy monthly submissions required to monitor the annual \$4 million/PPA (Program, Project, or Activity) and one percent current year funding thresholds. Approval of upward obligations has been delegated to base and MAJCOMs up to thresholds established by appropriation. However, by using OARS at all levels, reports can be generated at Headquarters without further field input. OARS also provides a means to document functional coordination and track the status of adjustments requiring headquarters approval.

Here Now!

✓ LANs

✓ PayCall System

✓ OARS

In addition to the workload side of the equation, we also recognize that in some cases we simply underestimated the workload. For example, after DFAS consolidation moved all our accountants to OPLOCs, we found that we needed more people in our accounting liaison activities than we had anticipated. So we have sought and gained a modest increase in personnel, amounting to an average of two enlisted positions per operating base. These positions will gradually be showing up in our community over the next two years.

Ongoing Efforts

- ✓ The new Defense Travel System (DTS) is one of our key ongoing efforts designed to reduce workload. DTS is being created by a multi-service travel reengineering team led by OSD. DTS will deploy software that automates most portions of the travel system including travel arrangements, personnel entitlements, budgeting, accounting, and financial management. It also flags exceptions to policy, computes allowable expenses, updates organizational travel budgets, and reimburses travelers through direct deposit to their bank accounts or charge cards. Internal controls are built in. When fully implemented, the DTS system will eliminate the need for paper processing of travel vouchers. DTS will initially be available only for active TDY travel but will be extended to PCS and reserve travel. We expect to begin deployment of the TDY system later this fiscal year.

DTS software will automate fully the process of voucher preparation and voucher calculation, which will significantly reduce FSO workload. Also, travelers, supervisors, and the travel agency will all have access to the same information—a feature which will eliminate a good number of FSO lobby customers and phone calls. The new travel system should also benefit our customers because the software contains all the data that users have had to previously look up elsewhere—city pair and best available transportation, lodging, and rental car rates.

Because there will be a significant workload reduction associated with DTS, we will reduce our base manpower authorizations once the new system is fully implemented. However, we do not plan to reduce manpower until the system is installed and operating at each base.

- ✓ We will soon begin phasing in the first increment of another new budget system, the Financial Information Resource SysTem (FIRST). We will bring Funds Management on first as we gradually replace ABIDES, CBAS, and MicroBAS. The initial Funds Management changes will include such features as automated budget authority, electronic interface with DFAS accounting systems, improved audit trail capability for funding transactions, better control of reprogramming, and a check of accounting status prior to funds withdrawal from subordinate organizations.

- ✓ The Automated Business Services System (ABSS) is a software application developed to automate financial document processing. The system enables those with a requirement to procure an end-item or service to enter that requirement on-line for coordination and funds certification. The system's intent is to shift financial processes from a hard copy AF Form 9, Request for Purchase, for example, to electronic paperless processing. The system includes options for electronic data transfer into the standard accounting systems to increase efficiency and accuracy during commitment of funds. There are some solid workload savings from ABSS because once we put the information in any part of the system, it automatically feeds to all the other systems without anyone having to reenter the data or correct bad data entered elsewhere on the base. Future enhancements (already scheduled) include interfaces with standard procurement (BCAS, ConWrite, and Standard Procurement System (SPS)) and payment systems (IAPS), additional form processing, and various inquiry functions. That phrase, additional form processing, is particularly important. This system will not only move procurement documents, but any document. More to come in the future with this system! The ABSS production version is scheduled for deployment at pilot sites in each MAJCOM and across AFMC in FY98, with the rest of the Air Force FY99 and out.

Coming Soon!

- ✓ Defense Travel Improvements
- ✓ FIRST for Budgeting
- ✓ ABSS for Financial Documents
- ✓ IMPAC for Purchases

- ✓ The International Merchants Purchase Authorization Card (IMPAC) has already streamlined the local purchase process. During the last several years, we have been working with the acquisition community to increase IMPAC use. IMPAC use has nearly tripled to 91 percent in early FY98! Reports suggest that IMPAC users like the convenience offered by the card.

Now it is time to streamline the financial processing of IMPAC transactions. Buying local purchase, or Form 9 items, with the IMPAC has eliminated a lot of the paperwork shuffle that our FSOs have had to deal with as base-level local purchase stores have been downsized or eliminated. However, our initiatives have had a two-fold effect. While we have eliminated the Form 9s, the IMPAC bill accounting and processing has become tedious. So we are going to modify and distribute the Automated IMPAC System (AIS) initially developed by the FSO at Edwards AFB. This paperless system will manage the IMPAC process of recording the purchase, producing the installation invoice, matching the invoice to funding documents, inputting accounting transactions into the accounting system, electronically certifying the invoice, and generating the EFT transactions for the payment to First Bank. This system will smoothly interface with all the accounting systems, using

the same accounting structure as the ABSS. If our testing is successful, we would expect to begin Air Force-wide training and implementation in the June/July 1998 time frame.

Gleams in Our Eye!

There are also a number of additional streamlining opportunities that we are considering as soon as appropriate security safeguards can be developed. For example, we have just begun concept testing a paperless military leave system. The system makes use of preformatted forms, but generates the leave transactions automatically, so there is no extra input preparation. Once the information is entered into the system, it is reproduced in all the appropriate form fields.

Another concept will allow military members and civilians to access a single WWW Pay Page and input allotment or similar changes to their pay records.

Yet another concept is the electronic leave and earnings statement (and net pay advice) for the military member. This concept would flow both documents directly to the member's e-mail box.

You Can Help

As you can see, we have a number of initiatives going throughout our area. We are dedicated to reducing, streamlining, reengineering—whatever words you want to attach to the process. We sincerely believe that our innovations will eliminate many of the routine tasks we perform today, and allow us to concentrate on those key decisions and processes that support the Air Force missions.

You can help in this effort. If there is a significant new process that you believe would aid the Air Force financial management community, let me know (haler@af.pentagon.mil). Also, when it comes time to deploy a new process at your base or installation, there is inevitably some disruption. Pitch in and help get the new system or process established.

With your help, we will get smaller smartly.